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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 000992

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/26/2026

TAGS: PINS MARR PREL PGOV PA BO VE

SUBJECT: PARAGUAY: THE CHANGING RELATIONS WITH BOLIVIA

REF: ASUNCION 0986

Classified By: DCM Michael J. Fitzpatrick; Reasons: 1.4(b),(d).

¶1. SUMMARY: (U) Paraguayan media September 27 trumpet charges by Bolivian Interior Vice Minister Puente that Paraguayan President Duarte is "a liar" FM Ramirez publicly told a midmorning radio call-in show that unless Bolivia withdraws such baseless accusations Paraguay will "withdraw the ambassadors." In addition, there have been reports of senior Bolivian military officers crossing the border without notice and inquiring about activities of U.S. military officials in the Chaco border region. No matter what public statements come out in the wake of the ongoing visit by the Bolivian Defense Minister, Paraguayan officials are increasingly hot under the collar towards both the Bolivian and Venezuelan regimes. END SUMMARY.

BOLIVIAN OFFICIAL BLASTS PARAGUAYAN PREZ

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¶2. (C) Bolivian Interior Vice-Minister Rafael Puente is reported in Paraguayan media September 27 as calling Paraguayan President Duarte "a liar," charging that Paraguay submitted forged documentation regarding Paraguayan nationals (Angel Acosta and Blas Franco Aquino) who sought and received political asylum in Bolivia. (NOTE: Paraguay is seeking their extradition to stand trial for the 2004-5 kidnapping and murder of Cecilia Cubas, daughter of former Paraguayan President Cubas. Bolivia subsequently had withdrawn asylum protections from the two, although their current whereabouts are unknown. The ongoing trial of a dozen fellow Partido Patria Libre conspirators, and allegations of FARC involvement, in the case remain in the daily headlines here. END NOTE.)

¶3. (C) Ceferino Valdez, the MFA's Undersecretary for Bilateral Affairs, told PolCouns September 27 that the Bolivian Foreign Ministry called in the Paraguayan Ambassador in La Paz to formally apologize for the statements made by Vice Minister Puente. Valdez also said that when the Paraguayan Foreign Ministry called in the Bolivian Ambassador, Marco Antonio Vidaurre, to ask for an explanation, he was accompanied by the visiting Bolivian Defense Minister, Walker San Miguel. Valdez said San Miguel again apologized for the statements made by Puente. Valdez indicated that the Foreign Ministry is in the process of preparing an official statement that is expected to say that Paraguay accepts the apologies.

¶4. (C) Juan Emilio Oviedo Cabanas, Director of International Affairs in the Attorney General's Office, told PolOff September 27 that the Bolivians are not questioning the case itself, just the documents submitted by the Attorney General's Office. He stated that he believed, but was awaiting confirmation that, they are questioning the names

and dates of birth. Oviedo said the GOP has requested the GOB to show them what information they believe is falsified.

SENIOR BOLIVIAN MILITARY OFFICERS CROSS BORDER?

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¶5. (C) As reported reftel, at least six Bolivian military officers entered Paraguay on or about September 20, near the city of General Eugenio Garay. Embassy sources said that the Bolivians were inquiring about the presence and activities of U.S. military personnel. (NOTE: The military personnel the Bolivians were referring to were an Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) team who were visiting the area to conduct end-use equipment monitoring and to survey possible locations for future humanitarian assistance exercises). DAO spoke to General Jose Kanazawa regarding this issue and Kanazawa said that the Bolivians did not follow the Security Agreement between the two nations, which requires 48-hour advance notice for senior level visits. Kanazawa also said that he has contacted the MFA to have them address the issue diplomatically. There have since been public media reports that as many as three dozen Bolivian military have crossed the border into Paraguayan territory, possibly more recently, and possibly in connection with this earlier event.

¶6. (C) DAO COMMENT: DAO gets the sense from his discussions with senior military officials that the GOP military perpetuate the rumor that the USG is building a base in the Chaco by merely remaining silent on the issue unless specifically asked or pressed about the issue. Two General Officer's indicated to the DAO that it is to their advantage that the Bolivians think there is U.S. presence in the Chaco, as this will make them think twice before considering taking any action against Paraguay. Other officers have shown interest and would welcome a U.S. base and want to know what it would take to set one up in Paraguay. END DAO COMMENT.

GOP OFFICIALS SHOW CONCERN

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¶7. (C) Visiting Massachusetts National Guard Commanding General Oliver Mason (Paraguay's counterpart State National Guard) met separately with both VP Castiglioni and Armed Forces Commanding General Jose Kanazawa on September 27. Castiglioni stressed the desire for close and ongoing military and civilian ties. He never mentioned Bolivia specifically - except in context of discussing Paraguay's victory in THE 1930's Chaco War. Kanazawa was remarkably unrestrained in private, repeatedly congratulating the US military for not responding to insults hurled at President George Bush and the US by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in NY. He also was quite animated (and evidently angry) towards the latest Bolivian activities and statements. When he left General Mason, General Kanazawa excused himself saying he then had to go hear an explanation "straight from the horse's mouth" (referring to the Bolivian MOD Walker San Miguel). A press gaggle after the meeting with VP Castiglioni repeatedly asked General Mason provocative questions about Chavez, Bolivia and possibilities of war with (or within) Bolivia. Mason refused to take the bait. But we can expect press play here to speculate as to the coincidental nature of the timing of visits by both a U.S. General and the Bolivian Defense Minister.

¶8. (C) Various Senators at Ambassador's September 26 dinner for General Mason stated that they are concerned that Venezuela and Bolivia are intent on "pushing us around." Colonel Juan Davison Rojas, the Chief of Public Affairs in the Army Logistics Command, told PolOff that senior officers are also very concerned about Bolivia rearming and planning to develop several new military facilities with the assistance of Venezuela. He stated that much of the anguish is over the border disputes the two countries have over the Chaco region. Davison said that the military needs new weapons and technology to offset this "possible threat." But, when queried whether the military has addressed their concerns with Congress, he indicated that they had not received support (mainly budgetary) from the Congress as of yet.

COMMENT

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¶9. (C) COMMENT: Senior Paraguayan government officials, civilian and military alike, are increasingly troubled by the recent developments along their border with Bolivia. Anti-Evo and Anti-Hugo suspicions are running high, though not feverish. The Paraguayan military, which has not received much support in the past from the Congress, are on edge and desire much more support from the USG, in terms of weaponry and training. Post will continue to press for continued military cooperation (including exercises) and "A&T" status for our troops. Such continued cooperation should also be high on the agenda for the possible meetings of FM Ramirez with Department officials in Washington in the first week of October. END COMMENT.

FITZPATRICK